Metro Manila

SHIFTING SPACES OF POWER AND HOPE IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

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To preserve their primacy and dominance, national capitals construct and assert representations and projects of power before the nation and the world. The national capital region (NCR) or Metro Manila serves as the major locus and staging area of these capital building strategies and assertions by the state and elite power as well as by the resistance of sub-altern groups. For the past three decades state power, capital, and democratic movements have become decentralized (multi-sited), heterogenous, and porous as reflected in the shifting spaces and symbols or representations of power in, and of the national capital.

In the Philippines, three major forces have shaped the process of building and asserting the capital city during the past two decades. These are: the decentralization of national government functions to the local government units (LGUs) of cities, municipalities and provinces; the democratization of socio-political life; and the nation's bid to be globally competitive in labor migration, business process outsourcing (BPOs) services and light export-oriented industries.

These processes have raised questions regarding the quality of life and sustainability of Metro Manila, the National Capital Region (NCR), posing challenges to its continuing dominance, desirability and representation of the nation-state. In the international media are contrasting images of high-rise buildings in the financial district and urban poor settlements in the sidestreets and suburbs, highlighting these issues. These contradictions have eroded and challenged the national capital's projection of hegemony and dominance, in part because of the multiple ways that state power, capita and democratic movements have become decentralized or multi-sited, heterogeneous and porous. These processes are reflected in the shifting spaces, symbols and representations of power in, and of, the national capital.

Among Asian capitals, Metro Manila has several things to be proud of. First, it is the site of the first modern revolution for freedom in Asia. Second, it is home to the most vibrant democratic and civil society movements in the world. Third, in this globalized world, Metro Manila's local governments have claimed and continue to claim a sizable chunk of the BPO industry which contribute greatly to the vibrancy and resilience of the Philippine economy. And fourth, the decentralization of local governments as exemplified by the cities in Metro Manila is one of the most advanced in Asia.

THE COLONIAL/POST-COLONIAL HERITAGE OF METRO MANILA

From a thriving Muslim settlement at the mouth of the Pasig River by the Manila Bay, Miguel Lopez de Legaspi established what would become the capital of Spanish colonization in Asia for the next three hundred years (1565–1898). In this area, the Spanish colonists built the walled city of Intramuros, where they located their state offices and residences while the indigenous population lived outside the walls, alongside the small Chinese trading population that settled around the inner city.

Jose Aguilera Rojas in "TheWestern Orient," summarized the role of the capital during this period:

> Between 1571 and 1898, the capital of the Philippine archipelago, practically on the edge of Asia, was the meeting point of the Western European world and oriental culture. At the end of the 16th century, an organized city was established ... the first modern city to be created in that geographical area ... an enclave of that western world in the heart of Asia, a city planned and designed in the western style but constructed with clearly oriental influences. The Galleon Trade plying between Manila-Americas-Europe represented the first phase of globalization.[1]

American colonial rule (1898–1946) started with the US victory over the Spain in the Battle of Manila Bay. Manila served as a direct link between the Philippines, its rulers and the world, and was the major gateway for agricultural exports and imports. Spanish and American colonial policies developed Manila as a primate city, exploiting the countryside to support the colonial bureaucracy.[2] With its developed port facilities and infrastructure, Manila became the favored location for commerce and industry. Post-war policies depeened this uneven development as reflected in the concentration of urban structures in the national capital.

World War II destroyed most of Manila, including the irreplaceable Spanish architectural treasures of Intramuros, making it the second most devastated city in the world, after Warsaw.

The historical specificity of Manila as a capital lies in its democratic heritage, being the site of the start of the 1898 Philippine Revolution, the first modern war of liberation in Asia that installed the first parliamentary democracy as a system of governance. After two decades of authoritarian rule, the 1986 People Power Revolution which was centered in Manila, installed a democratic and decentralized regime of governance.

Since then, in the last three decades, this specificity has been reconfigured by the insertion to the global economy in the National Capital Region through labor migration and services to transnational capital. All these forces are reflected in the significance of new public spaces, buildings and monuments in what used to be the suburbs of Manila, but now occupy center stage in national politics, commerce, industry and culture.

MANILA: PRESENTING/REPRESENTING IDENTITY AND POWER

National capitals serve as representations of power in the nation and before the world. Thus, before the nation and the international community, Manila is viewed synonymously with the Philippines and the Filipino people. It is the seat of political, economic and socio-cultural power.

Shatkin describes the metropolis as "the economic and political epicenter of the country."[3] Manila connects the country to the world, being the the major transport, finance, political and socio-cultural hub of the nation. Those living in the provinces call it "Imperial Manila" because state bureaucrats, businessmen and residents tend to treat the rest of the country like their vassals.

In 1933, to decongest Manila, the government decided to transfer the capital to Quezon City because its large and less populated area would allow proper urban planning and design. However, this decision was hardly implemented until President Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s transferred some government offices to the National Government Center in Quezon City.

The congestion of Manila has also led to a retreat by the elite to the suburbs. In the 1930s, New Manila in Quezon City was developed as an exclusive residential community, while Makati, now the financial district replacing Binondo in Manila Chinatown became a private exclusive development in the 1950s. Other suburban areas like Cubao in Quezon City sprang up in the 1960s.

THE NCR AND THE DISPERSION OF MANILA

Rapid population growth and congestion led to the sprawl of Manila to the suburbs and surrounding areas. In 1975, President Marcos issued Presidential Decree 824, incorporating the 16 cities and municipalities around Manila and formally creating Metropolitan Manila or the National Capital Region (see Figure 1).

As Manila expanded to become the NCR, the urban landscape was transformed and organized into several sub-centers. Makati became the financial center alongside exclusive gated communities, expensive hotels and other high-end consumption spaces. Recent additions to these cities within cities are the Ortigas Center in Mandaluyong and Pasig, Eastwood City and Gateway in Quezon City, Ayala Alabang Center in Muntinglupa, the Mall of Asia in Paranaque City, and Global City in Taguig City (formerly Fort Bonfacio, a military reservation), to name a few.

FIGURE 1. Map of Metro Manila

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

In 2000, Metro Manila had a population of 10 million. This increased to 12 million in 2007.[4] Currently, it has an estimated daytime population of 16 million. Among world cities, Metro Manila ranks seventh in population size and 15th in population density (10, 550 per sq. km). Among Philippine cities, the next most populous is Cebu City with only one-tenth of the NCR's population and density.

Metro Manila is the central major hub of the national economic engine. It accounts for one-third of the country's total GDP, followed by the adjoining provinces of the CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) region with 12.3 percent. It has the fastest growing econony, contributing 2.2 percentage points to the GDP and with the highest GDP growth rates at 8.8 percent, compared to the national average of 5.4 percent.[5] It hosts one-third of the country's total foreign direct investments (FDI) and accounts for almost one-half of the growth in services.[6]

In 2003, Metro Manila had a real per capita income of P39,639, almost double that of the Cordillera region, the second highest, with P17,836. Metro Manila's standard of living, however, as indicated in its Human Development Index (HDI) score of .777 is quite low compared to other cities in advanced economies (e.g., Hongkong, .916; Singapore, .907) but scored favorably against other Philippine cities (Cebu, .728; Davao, .702).

The NCR is the educational and cultural center of the country, hosting half of its universities and educational institutions and the monopoly of communications institutions. Thus, the demographic, economic and socio-cultural primacy of the National Capital Region is undisputed. But what threatens this primacy is its dwindling quality of life and questionable environmental sustainability. Traffic jams, floods, mass protests, impermeable gated communities, exclusive commercial and consumption spaces, empowered urban poor groups in huge informal settlements, among others, make the NCR challenging to navigate.

The projects of the state highlight the ways that its primacy is continually crafted and asserted. These are, the Philippine state as "brokering" state support for labor migration, the urban renewal program initiated by the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) and other flagship infrastructural programs, and incentive support for human resource needs of transnational capital. To support the human resource needs of the business process outsourcing sector, the state provides excellent support to educational institutions to upgrade the competencies of supermaids, call center agents, medical transciptionists and others.

The NCR and the nation-state are often associated in the international arena with the impression of a weak economy propped up by overseas remittances from migrant workers and a weak state threatened by coups d'etat, protests and demonstrations. Reinforcing these negative images at the spatial level are the seemingly uncoordinated efforts at urban renewal, gentrification and infrastructure development in the NCR resulting in social and physical divisions. For example, huge flyovers and highways that need connections to mass transport points can render the city challenging to navigate, except by motor vehicles.

Mimicking the Los Angeles sprawl, the NCR's circumferential roads, fly-overs and street patterns are obviously designed for vehicle-centered mobility. However, only 20 percent of NCR households own motor vehicles, while 50 percent of the nation's registered vehicles ply Manila's streets. Urban planning in Metro Manila reflects how political leaders at various historical junctures assert their urban visions to legitimize their rule.[7] Thus, the urban design and landscape of the capital city reflect the socio-political and economic relations of the rulers and the ruled, between the center and the peripheral areas of the country.

The quality of life in the national capital is reflected in the ranking of Asia's most livable cities. In 1998, Metro Manila ranked 16th among 35 cities while the secondary city of Cebu ranked higher at 14th place. In 1999 and 2000, Metro Manila went down to 25th place, while Cebu City went down to 17th.[8] To combat this declining quality of life and environmental sustainability, the MMDA has launched a series of urban renewal programs to complement the flagship programs of the national government designed to improve the internal and external "navigability" of the city.

Dispersion of Symbols and Sites of Power

As Manila expanded into the NCR in the 1970s, institutions and symbols of state and elite power also got dispersed across the metropolis. Malacañang, the residence of the president, the highest official of the land, remained in Manila but the Philippine Congress relocated to two cities: the Upper House (Senate) in Pasay City while the Lower House (House of Representatives), together with some government ministries were transferred to the National Government Center in Quezon City. But other ministry offices of the executive, legislature and the judiciary are spread all over the metropolis. The old Congress building has been converted into the National Museum.

In like manner, ceremonial/ritual places of the national capital have also shifted in importance and significance. The Quirino Grandstand at the Rizal National Park is, traditionally, the place where the newly elected president of the Republic takes his or her oath of office. But at the height of the People Power revolt in 1986, Cory Aquino (the widow of the slain Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr.), with the strong support of both business and popular sectors in the February 1986 snap elections, took her oath as president in the elite Club Filipino in Mandaluyong City, a suburb or Manila. At around the same time, Ferdinand Marcos, who was holed up in Malacanang, summoned the international and local press for his oath-taking at a balcony overlooking the palace grounds.

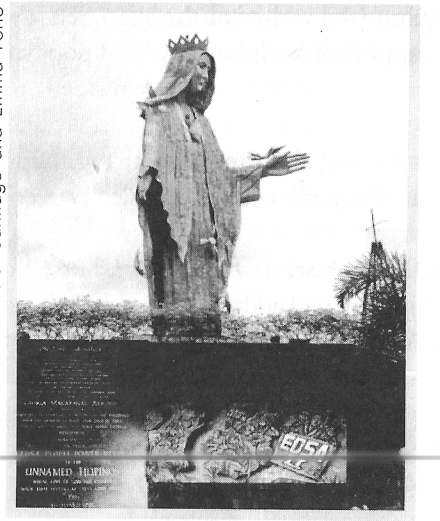
Joseph Estrada took his oath of office in historic Barasoain Church in nearby Bulacan province, but delivered his inaugural address from the Quirino Grandstand. After the 2001 EDSA II People Power that removed President Joseph Estrada from office, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo took her oath as president of the Republic on the stage above the EDSA Shrine in Pasig City. When formally elected in 2004, Mrs. Arroyo chose to be inaugurated in Cebu City which had given her the largest number of votes.

Shifting Spaces of Democracy and Resistance

The sites of democratic assertions and resistance have also shifted in the past three decades. Political demonstrations used to be held in public plazas in Manila like the Luneta, Mendiola and Plaza Miranda. The latter was the site of a bombing of a Liberal Party rally in 1971 that led to the suspension by President Marcos of the writ of habeas corpus. The following year, Marcos declared martial law.

The marked shift in the places for popular protest began in 1983, after the assassination of Ninoy Aquino when Makati became a hospitable venue for protests by the middle class. Plaza Lawton in Manila also became an alternative site for protest actions. The 1986 People Power Revolution was held along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) in Quezon City and on Ortigas Avenue in Mandaluyong City, the area between Camp Crame and Camp Aguinaldo—the bases of the generals and soldiers who had declared mutiny against Mr. Marcos. At the intersection of Edsa and Ortigas Avenues, groups associated with the late Jaime Cardinal Sin, who was instrumental in calling the people to both EDSA I and II, and the late Cory Aquino, installed the EDSA Shrine (Figure 2), where a statue of the Virgin Mary, whose intercession is believed to have saved demonstrators from harm, rises above the traffic.

When Cory Aquino was succeeded by Fidel Ramos, one of generals who led EDSA I and a Protestant, a more secular marker, the EDSA People Power Monument (see Figure 3) was erected near Camp Aguinaldo, not far from the EDSA Shrine. This monument highlights the triumph of freedom symbolized by a woman supported by different sectors of society (represented by figures of peasants, workers, soldiers, nuns/priests, etc.), with the colors of the Philippine flag at the base. Beside it is a statue of Ninoy Aquino, whose assassination triggered the popular protests that led to EDSA I. Interestingly, the EDSA Shrine is now more associated with EDSA II, with the addition of a plaque and a bas relief depicting the events and personalities responsible for both EDSA I and II. These monuments, however, are aesthetically challenged.



Nestor Santiago and Emma Porio

FIGURE 2

In the last 10 years, the sites of democratic assertions and protests have shifted to these monuments and other urban spaces. Groups associated with the political left and the opposition hold their protests at the EDSA People Power Monument (EDSA, Quezon City), Plaza Miranda and Plaza Lawton (Manila), the Ninoy Aquino Monument (Makati City), the Lower House of Congress (Quezon City) or the Senate (Pasay City). Those associated with the political right, social democrats and/or the Church held their protests at the EDSA Shrine (Mandaluyong City) until 2001 when it was declared off-limits to demonstrators after the Edsa III rallyists loyal to Joseph Estrada defiled the church during a four-day sit-in.

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FIGURE 3

In the same manner, the sites of 1989 coup d'etat and other destabilization attempts (e.g., the 2003 Oakwood mutiny, the 2007 Peninsula Hotel hold-out) were staged in the financial district of Makati, highlighting that fact that political economy is at the heart of the ills of the nation-state and hitting the business community where it hurts—right in their own front yard.

But the February 2008 mass protests against corruption of the Macapagal-Arroyo regime showed the different factions of the politico-economic elite and civil society organizations colonizing different sites of resistance. Oppositionists, including Cory Aquino, staged their protests on Ayala Avenue in Makati near the Ninoy Aquino monument, while pro-administration demonstrators rallied at the Welcome Rotunda Monument (symbolizing freedom) in Quezon City.

It would seem that the EDSA People Power monument and the EDSA Shrine have lost their luster, largely because of the people's frustration over the aftermath of the two People Power events in 1986 and 2001. For most Filipinos, both bloodless revolutions immortalized in the two EDSA monuments did not bring about the fundamental changes they desired in the Philippine political economy.

The two EDSA monuments were erected to symbolize the fight for freedom from dictatorship and abuse of power through a series of sustained massive demonstrations along EDSA Avenue in 1986 and around the EDSA Shrine in 2000–2001. While most Manila residents would argue that the 1986 and 2000 protests occurred nationwide, this is often disputed by those in the provinces. The installation of these monuments as symbols of Filipino heroism in the struggle for democracy remain largely inspired by the brokers of power in the national capital.

Manila as the site of the first modern struggle for national liberation in Asia has created a particular democratic consciousness in the nation. World War II reinforced this imagery and the 1986 EDSA People Power highlighted our democratic tradition that served as an inspiration for other democratic revolutions that occurred later in other parts of the world. But EDSA II, the violent pro-Estrada EDSA III protests in May 2001, and several coup attempts have also highlighted some political weakness in the national capital and the nation-state.

Most of the massive protests and demonstrations in Metro Manila are picked up by the international media, in the process feeding and shaping a negative image of the national capital before the world. In particular, I refer to protests by migrant groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) against the state's inability to protect Filipino migrants' abroad. Two massive mass actions underscore this phenomenon: those associated with the trial and execution in the mid-1990s of Flor Contemplacion, the Filipina domestic helper in Singapore, and the 2004 hostage-kidnapping of the Filipino truck driver, Angelo de la Cruz, in Iraq. The Contemplacion protests had both international and local repercussions. It strained relations between Singapore and the Philippines, affected the outcome of the senatorial elections, blighted the careers of two cabinet officials and two ambassadors, and brought about the revamp of the state machinery tasked to manage migration and the enactment of new laws affecting migrant rights.

The Angelo de la Cruz case is of particular significance because the kidnapping of a Filipino truck driver in Iraq inserted a seemingly internal labor migration issue into the politics of global terrorism, in the process highlighting Manila both in international and national arenas. The mass protests and demands of migrant groups made President Arroyo withdraw the Filipino contingent in Iraq to save the life of the migrant driver who had to leave his family for a dangerous job abroad to support them. This accomodation was a bold assertion on the part of the Philippine government to assert its own interests before the "coalition of the willing."

In both instances, Manila, as the site of popular mobilizations, highlighted the state's brokering role in labor migration and the need to strengthen its ability to protect its citizens and the political economy as a whole.

Labor migration and workers' rights have assumed a prominent role in the diplomatic agenda and state negotiations. In the 2006 ASEAN meetings in Cebu City, the issue of workers' rights was a thorny issue. In early 2007, President Arroyo appealed to the King of Saudi Arabia to pardon 800 Filipinos held in Saudi prisons. Over the past 30 years, diplomatic and trade relations between Manila and Filipino labor-receiving countries have been heavily saddled with labor migration issues, underscoring the national capital as the stage to assert our democratic ideals in a globalizing world.

Globalization of Civil Society Politics and Migration

Adding complexity to the dynamics of the state-capital-labor nexus is the "globalization" of civil society politics supporting migrant rights across multiple and shifting political and socio-cultural borders. International negotiations between Manila and the labor-receiving nations are strongly mediated by international and local NGOs, such as Migrante International and the Coalition for Workers Rights, that have offices and representatives in major capitals with large Filipino migrant labor like Hong Kong, Rome, Spain, San Francisco and Washington, DC. Thus, the politics of assertion and representation both by state/elite and subaltern groups moves fluidly along local, national and global lines.

DECENTRALIZATION: CARVING POWER FROM THE CAPITAL

While the decentralization of governance in 1992 seemed to pose a serious challenge to Metro Manila's hegemony, it actually released the dynamic potentials of local governments in the metropolis. Designed to decongest the metropolis and unleash the potentials of localities in carving their socio-economic destinies, decentralization allowed secondary cities to capture some of the investments in BPO services and export processing zones, giving stiff competition (through lower rent/cost of living, no traffic congestion, etc.) to Metro Manila's suburban centers (i.e., Eastwood in Quezon City, Ortigas in Mandaluyong City, Global City in Taguig, etc.).

The current boom in real estate and services that has transformed the NCR landscape is due mainly to the flows of transnational capital and services from overseas remittances and FDIs that are mainly channeled to BPOs and light-export oriented industries. National and local politics very much mediate the insertion of these capital flows to the spatial fabric and social structure of the NCR. These mediations are often expressed in the debates and conflicts among different state and elite factions about contracts regarding flagship programs in infrastructure development such as the light rail transit system, bridges, skyways, flyovers, modern airports, modern communication systems, etc, that will make the city attractive to transnational

investments. Because of these constraints, multi-million dollar infrastructure projects meant to make the city more attractive to investors have taken more time to be implemented.

Meanwhile, the local economy is vitalized by overseas remittances and the expansion of services (e.g., BPOs) for transnational and local capital. In 2008, nine million Filipinos, the 10 percent of the population and one-fourth of its labor force who are working abroad sent about US$17 billion dollars, 20 percent higher than what the country gets in overseas development assistance (ODA).[9] Meanwhile, the government projects that the NCR will capture US$180 billion worth of the increasing demand for outsourcing by 2010.

CONCLUSION

Metro Manila today continues to dominate the nation's political-economic and socio-cultural life, its major platform for articulating this position to the world. But its articulation of power and representation is strongly shaped by the character of its urban politics and the ways it is inserted into the global economy through labor migration and out-sourcing services. The ways that transnational capital and politics get channeled into the spatial fabric of the metropolis is largely mediated by its fragmented urban politics.

These political-economic forces are reflected in the shifting spaces and symbols or representations of power in and of the national capital. With the expansion of Manila into the National Capital Region began the dispersion of symbols and sites of state power from Manila proper to its different suburbs and component cities. In the same manner, ritual and ceremonial spaces and sites of resistance were shifted or created in other parts of the metropolis by different factions of both the old and new political and economic elite or by democratic movements spearheaded by NGOs and civil society organizations. This has been brought about in part by the decentralization of urban development and the fragmentation of urban politics in the capital region, strongly mediated by local, national and global processes.

NOTES

[1] Jose Aguilera Rojas, *Manila, 1571–1898: The Western Orient* (Madrid: Ministerio de Fomento, Secretaria General Tecnica, Centro de Publicaciones, 1998).

[2] Manuel Caoili, *The Origins of Metropolitan Manila: A Political and Social Analysis* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988).

[3] Gavin Shatkin, "Colonial Capital, Modernist Capital, Global Capital Capital: The Changing Political Symbolism of Urban Space in Metro Manila, Philippines," *Pacific Affairs* 78, no. 4 (2006): 577.

[4] National Census and Statistical Board Report 2006.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Eduardo T. Gonzalez, et al. *Managing Urbanization under a Decentralized Framework* (Makati: Philippine Institute for Development Studies [PIDS] and Demographic Research and Development Foundation [DRDF], 2001).

[7] Gavin Shatkin, "The City and the Bottom Line: Urban Mega projects and the Privatization of Planning in Southeast Asia," in *Capital Cities in Asia-Pacific: Primacy and Diversity*, ed. Kong Cho Ho and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2006).

[8] Available in http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/features/asiacities2000/cities.intor.html.

[9] Emma Porio, "Global Householding, Gender and Filipino Migration: An Initial Review," *Philippine Studies* 55, no. 2 (2007): 211–42.

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